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LETTER DATED 4 SEPTEMBER 1992 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

Acting under paragraph 5 of resolution 771 (13 August 1992) where the Security Council "calls upon States ... to collate substantiated information in their possession or submitted to them relating to the violations of humanitarian law, including grave breaches of the Geneva conventions, being committed in the territory of the former Yugoslavia and to make this information available to the Council;".

I have the honour to present to you the attached report "Rape by Order: Bosnian Women Terrorized by Serbs", written by Mr. Roy Gutman and published by the New York Newsday on 23 August 1992. Mr. Gutman's reports have been widely distributed and used as a source for subsequent reports by the international humanitarian organizations.

Mr. Gutman has expressed strong willingness to present his findings related to this report and to many other widely read reports to the Security Council and the Secretary-General, collectively or individually.

May I ask for your kind assistance in circulating the report as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Muhamed SACIRBEY
Ambassador and Permanent Representative

Annex

BOSNIAN WOMEN TERRORIZED BY SERBS

By Roy Gutman - European Correspondent

TUZLA, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serb forces in northern Bosnia systematically raped 40 young Muslim women of a town they captured early this summer, telling some of their victims they were under orders to do so, the young women say.

Statements by victims of the assault, describing their ordeal in chilling detail, bear out reports that the Serb conquerors of Bosnia have raped Muslim women, not as a byproduct of the war but as a principal tactic of the war.

"We have orders to rape the girls", Mirsada, 23, one of 20 young victims interviewed by New York Newsday, said the young man who abducted her told her. He said he was "ashamed to be a Serb" and added that "everything that is going on is a war crime", she said.

Hafiza, also 23, said she sought to dissuade the soldier who raped her. "I tried crying and begging" she said. "I said, 'You have a mother and a sister, a female in the family.' He said nothing. He didn't talk. Then he said 'I must. I must.' I said, 'You must not, if you don't want to.'" But she was unable to stop him.

The incident involved 40 young women from Brezovo Polje, a small town on the Sava River, where conquering forces marched in, seized all the civilians, and dispatched them according to age and gender to their assigned fate.

The rape victims were interviewed in a refugee center, their only refuge after the destruction of their homes, their families and the basis of their economic survival. They agreed to be quoted and photographed, provided they were identified only by first name and age.

"We want the world to know about our truth. All mothers. All women", said Senada, 17, who wrote a statement by hand and gave it to the chief gynecologist at Tuzla Hospital with the request she pass it on to New York Newsday. "I wouldn't want anyone else to have the same experience. It is worse than any other punishment in the world."

The Brezovo Polje episode is only one of a number of indications of a pattern of systematized rape during the Serb conquest of Bosnia.

In separate interviews in Tuzla, four young women from the village of Liplje, near Zvornik, said their Serb captors had detained them in a makeshift bordello where three or more men raped them every night for 10 nights. A leading Bosnian women's group charged that upward of 10,000 Bosnian women are currently being held in Serb detention camps where their captors rape them repeatedly, though that has not been independently confirmed. Another pattern is the rape of pregnant women and some middle-aged women.

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Dr. Melika Kreitmayer, leader of the gynecological team that examined 25 of the 40 victims from Brezovo Polje, said she and her colleagues are convinced that the object of the rapes was "to humiliate Muslim women, to insult them, to destroy their persons and cause shock."

"These women were not raped because it was the male instinct. They were raped because it was the goal of the war", she said. "My impression is that someone had an order to rape the girls."

She cited as proof that some young women said they had been taken to a house and not raped, but were instructed to tell others that they had been raped.

Kreitmayer, who is of Muslim origin and whose team includes a Serb and Slovene doctor, made those assertions without any sign of objection from colleagues. "We are shocked by what we have heard," commented her Serb colleague, Dr. Nenad Trifkovic.

According to the young women, the rapists discussed the assaults with their victims as a mission they had to accomplish. Many of the men fortified their resolve by taking white pills, the women said. The men's claim they were operating under orders was reinforced when a new group of irregular forces arrived that owed its allegiance to one of the most savage of the warlords, Vojislaav Seselj, a militant nationalist from Sarajevo. The leaders of the original group tried to protect the women of Brezovo Polje from the Seselj followers, the women indicated.

"'Don't worry. The girls have been raped once,'" Zlata, 23, recalled one of the officers as telling the Seselj followers.

According to the victims, preparations for the mass rape began early on the morning of June 17, when Serb soldiers in army uniforms and masks piled out their minivans and rounded up the Muslims of Brezovo Polje for "ethnic cleansing".

They loaded the able-bodied men from 18 to 60 onto buses and sent them "for interrogation" to Luka, a notorious, Serb-run detention camp in nearby Brcko, where nine in 10 prisoners were slaughtered, according to a survivor interviewed by New York Newsday.

Then they packed about 1,000 women, children, and old people into eight buses, drove them around the countryside for two days and held them under armed guard for four terrifying nights without food or water in a parking lot in the nearby town of Ban Brdo, the victims said. Serb soldiers returning from the front invaded the buses every night and led off women and girls to an unknown location at knifepoint, recalled Senada, 17. "They threw them out in the morning, and their clothes were torn, and they were covered with blood", she said.

Finally the group arrived in Caparde, where about 50 Serb irregulars, bearded followers of a warlord named Zeljko Arkan, robbed the mothers and forcibly separated them from their daughters. The mothers were taken by bus and deposited in a war zone. Meanwhile, in the Osnovo furniture warehouse in Capaerde, where the daughters were held, the men, mostly with long beards in the style of the World War II Serbian royalist force known as the Chetniks, selected what one of the rapists said were the 40 prettiest young women and raped them in groups of 10.

Hajrira, 21, said she asked Dragan, the man who raped her, why they were doing it. "He said we are the cleanest convoy that passed Caparde, the prettiest and most attractive, and that they wouldn't let us pass because we are so beautiful."

The victims are aged 15 to 30, wi*h careful dress and gentle manners.

"They would come by and tap us on the shoulder," recalled Herija, 21, another victim. "They told everyone else that we had gone to 'fetch water'. Some of the girls came back two hours later. Some the next morning. And each of them sat down and cried" she said.

The mothers arrived in Tuzla on June 23, distraught about their missing daughters and traumatized by the journey, which began with another bus ride and ended with a forced 12-mile walk through a war zone on a road littered with human corpses.

Their daughters arrived four days later, after a forced walk across a mined road with number of elderly people of whom died en route, they said.

The young women were exhausted and in a state of shock, doctors said. Most, according to the gynecological team later examined them, had vaginal infections of staphylococcus and other bacteria that originate in dirt or fecal matter.

Almost every one of 20 women interviewed by New York Newsday reported that the men who raped them were filthy and smelly, and, in some cases, bloody.

The health and psychological stresses upon the young women of Prezovo Polje are only part of their tragedy, for each of Brezovo Polje are only part of their tragedy, for each is missing a father or a brother. Few of the women have anywhere to go, and the rapes have shaken their confidence. Almost every one broke into tears as she talked over several days to this reporter.

Their trauma is not over, for Kreitmayer noted, many of them may be pregnant. The hospital will provide hormonal drugs to induce abortion, she added.

The deepest hurt seems to be moral shame. These women from the countryside, where premarital sex is prohibited, and Kreitmayer confirmed that all but one had been virgins. Most of them think they have been ruined. "We

all feel that we lost everything," said Heira, 25, "... Every woman, if she is raped, has to feel the same."

Satka, 20, said she despised the man who raped her because "he had no feeling for me. I wasn't his girlfriend. It was savagery." She said she felt shame because "I was an honest girl. I was a virgin. I gave it to someone who didn't deserve it. Someone whom I love deserves it. But not a savage."

Several pregnant women who were raped were so shattered that they asked to have their babies aborted.

Kreitmayer said one nurse from Brezovo Polje had lost her mother, father, husband, and 4-year-old child "in front of her eyes". The woman told doctors the Serb conquerors decided not to kill her but brought her to their military hospital. "She worked everyday for them but every night she was raped. She was sick. She was desperate. She told them she was between two and three months pregnant. But it meant nothing for them", Kreitmayer said.

For young women of Brezovo Polje, shame alternates with anger. Each time this reporter returned to the school where they are living, a large group of victims joined in the discussion. Rape has been so rare over the years in Bosnia that there are few professional counselors, and Kreitmayer said this was the first appearance of mass rape and aggression toward women.

The victims say that right now they would like to be anywhere but in Bosnia. Most say that once they leave, they do not plan to return ever again.